



Thelma Bunting

Sarah McLennan and Mary Gainer visited Thelma Bunting on 13 March 2012, shortly before she was to celebrate her 102 birthday. Although her memory was poor, her daughter was there to help. Thelma had a photo album which included her retirement party and she seemed happy to look at the pictures and remember some of the people who attended.

Thelma Bunting did not come to NACA with a degree in math, as most of the computers. In fact, she did not graduate from high school due to an illness. She married at 16 and raised a family. Her husband was a waterman from Poquoson and lived on Bunting Avenue – where many of the Bunting families lived. Mr. Bunting died in 1953 when a large wave hit his fishing boat and he was washed overboard.

Thelma was suddenly left with small children and made the decision to return to school. She finished at a business school and was hired at NACA sometime before 1955. Although she was not able to remember details of her work, she was a computer who plotted the curvature of missiles in orbit.

Thelma's grandson, Chuck, remembered stories of his grandmother working. He attended some of the parties held at the Center and was in several pictures of Thelma's retirement party. Chuck also remembered that it was not an easy transition for Thelma to leave her family and start a career. He said that when Thelma "first got the job, how nervous she was about working with the engineers, and that on the way to work she would have to pull over (with a queasy stomach). Someone mentioned to her to ask the engineers if she had a question, and how she discovered how helpful and kind of excited they were to tell her all that they knew. After that she kept her breakfast down. He also remembered how she brought home a map that she gave to him."

Thelma's sister Hilda Forrest Menetch (1914-2008) was also a mathematician at NASA. It does not seem that Hilda had anything to do with Thelma getting hired. But it is interesting to note that Hilda's daughter Barbara married Paul Holloway – who went on to become the Center Director from 1991-1996.

Thelma retired in 1972 and continues to live in Poquoson.